Submitter: Barbara Kahl

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3166

Oregonians spoke clearly: nearly 60% voted against Measure 117, rejecting ranked-choice voting (RCV) for federal and statewide elections. This decisive “no” reflected widespread skepticism about overhauling a voting system that, while not perfect, is straightforward and trusted. Yet, just four months later, the Democratic supermajority in Salem is pushing HB 3166—a bill that not only revives RCV but also mandates open primaries—ignoring the electorate’s will. This move is a direct affront to democracy, and it deserves fierce opposition.

Measure 117’s defeat wasn’t a fluke. Oregon voters, across party lines, weighed RCV’s promises—more choice, less partisanship—against its realities: complexity, cost, and potential for confusion. They chose familiarity with 60% opposing it. The message was unmistakable: stick with winner-takes-all elections for Congress, and state offices. HB 3166 disregards this, resurrecting RCV, adding open primaries—a double dose of reform voters didn’t ask for. Feedback from Oregonians underscore the outrage: “Do they understand they are literally going against the will of the people?” The answer seems to be no, or worse, they don’t care.

Ranked-Choice Voting: A Flawed Experiment

RCV sounds appealing—rank candidates, ensure a majority winner—but it’s a mess in practice. Look at Alaska’s 2022 special election: Sarah Palin’s presence split the vote, knocking out a moderate Republican preferred by more voters overall, handing the seat to a Democrat in a red-leaning state. That’s not “majority rule”; it’s a spoiler effect dressed up as reform. In Oregon, where close races often favor Democrats, RCV could flip seats unpredictably, alienating voters who ranked their top choice only to see their last pick win. The Equal Vote Coalition warned of this during Measure 117’s debate, noting RCV “ignores most voters’ rankings,” risking outcomes that defy intent.

Then there’s the logistics. County clerks, who manage elections, opposed Measure 117, citing millions in unfunded costs for new software, staff training, and voter education. HB 3166 doesn’t fix this—it doubles down. Reconciling ranked ballots across 36 counties, especially with multiple pages (voters often skip races), is a nightmare. Public trust in elections, already shaky, could erode further if results drag out or errors pile up, fueling conspiracy theories.

Open Primaries: Stripping Party Rights

HB 3166’s open primaries mandate compounds the problem. Oregon’s closed primaries let Republicans and Democrats pick their nominees—full stop. Opening them to all voters, including independents (over 33% of the electorate), dilutes party autonomy. Why should non-members dictate a party’s standard-bearer? In Idaho, where a similar push is splitting the GOP, traditionalists argue it’s a “leftist” ploy to

meddle in conservative strongholds. Oregon's GOP calls it a "snake oil sales pitch," and they're not wrong—open primaries could drown out loyalists, favoring bland centrists over principled candidates. Voters rejected this implicitly with Measure 117, which didn't pair RCV with open primaries precisely because it's a bridge too far.

The Cost of Arrogance

Proponents—mostly Democrats who rammed Measure 117 through the 2023 Legislature—claim RCV and open primaries empower voters. But Oregonians didn't buy it then, and they won't now. HB 3166's rushed rollout, with a public hearing scheduled March 19, 2025, less than a day after announcement, reeks of desperation to bypass dissent.

The Verdict

HB 3166 isn't reform—it's overreach. Oregonians rejected RCV because it's convoluted, costly, and unproven. They didn't sign up for open primaries either, which erode party identity in a state where primaries already shape competitive generals. The Legislature should honor the 2024 vote, not subvert it. Kill HB 3166 in committee. Let the people's voice stand. Anything less mocks the democracy its backers claim to champion.